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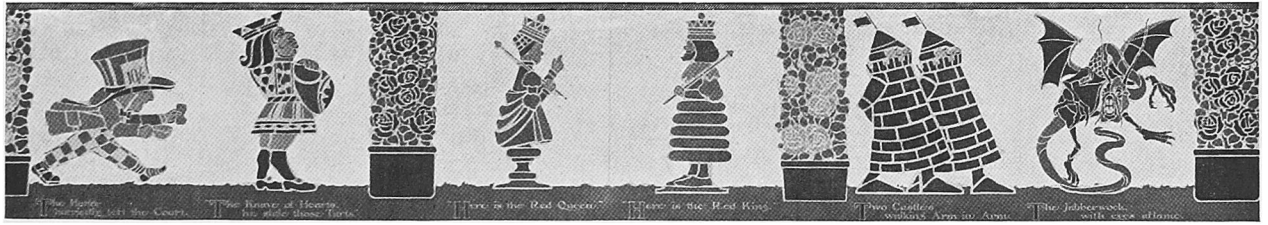
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Courtesy of Joseph P. McHugh and Son

THE "ALICE IN WONDERLAND" NURSERY FRIEZE: IN FOUR PARTS.

THE MODERN NURSERY

BY WALTER A. DYER

*Author of "The Lure of the Antique," "Early American Craftsmen,"
"Creators of Decorative Styles," Etc.*

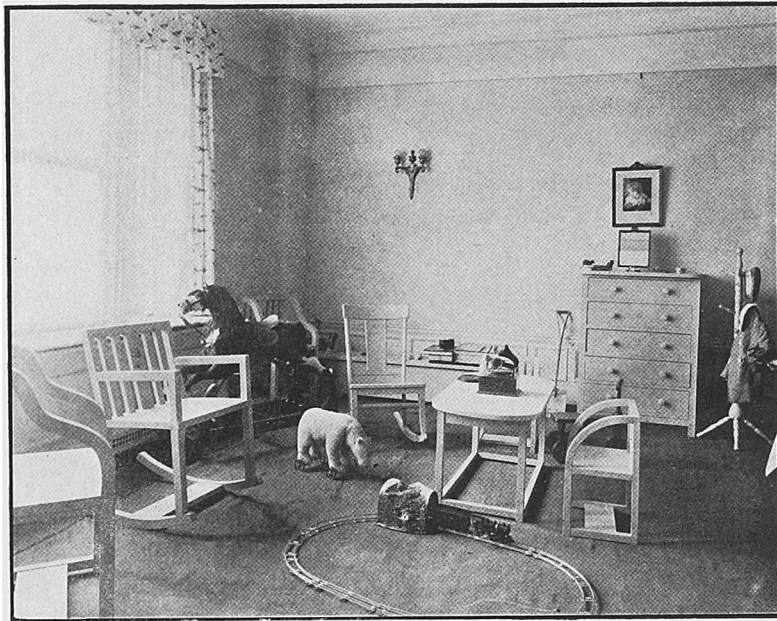
A GOOD deal of what has been written about the child's room and juvenile furnishings would be called, in the ordinary newspaper office, "hot air," "drool," "slush," "guff," and "bull." It has been largely written in a vague, high-brow style by temperamental ladies for Sunday newspaper supplements. It has dealt in a lofty manner with the educational value of the child's daily environment, and it has succeeded in giving a faddish, freakish cast to the whole subject.

I am not denying that environment—decorative environment—has its effect on the child's mind, but I believe that effect has not been fully understood. It has been treated theoretically rather than practically, and I believe it is time we approached the subject with a little rational common sense.

In the first place, the child's furniture, like that of his parents, should first be designed for use and comfort. If the element of grace and style can be added, so much the better. In the second place, the modern nursery should be clean and sanitary; no one will gainsay that. In the third place, the child is not peculiar in liking to have things pretty and

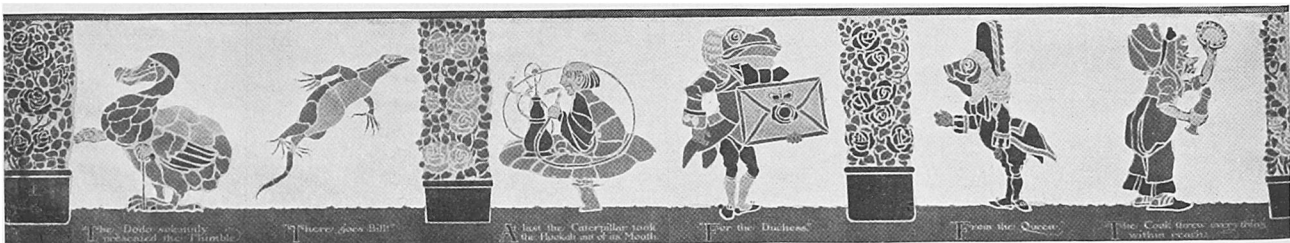
amusing; we grown-ups like them that way, too, only perhaps our standards are different. Finally, if the decorations of the nursery may be made mentally stimulating, it is an added advantage. Comfort, health, beauty, educational value—these are the fundamental elements of the modern nursery.

Let us begin, then, at the practical end of it—the usefulness and physical comfort of juvenile furnishings. A good many things have been designed for the nursery that are merely freakish. Installed in a child's room they produce an effect of strangeness and restlessness. To a large extent the same principles should guide the purchaser of juvenile furnishings that control the selection of things for grown-ups. If a child is to have a



NURSERY CONTAINING FURNITURE DESIGNED BY HELEN SPEER

chair, let it be one that will give him the maximum amount of usefulness, one that he will want to sit in, a comfortable chair, even if it doesn't depict for him the entire story of Jack and the Beanstalk. After all, it is a chair and not a picture book. The same holds true of the desk, the bed, and the rest; let them first be comfortable and useful. And let the curtains be chosen to control the light rather than for their pictorial character. Not that the matter of pictorial





decoration is unworthy of consideration, but it is not of the first importance. Above all, sharp corners may well be avoided in the furniture; they may cause ugly bruises. In general, straight lines, simple curves, and broad surfaces are best.

It is hardly necessary, in this enlightened age, to speak of the sanitary requirements. Things that collect dust and dirt and germs should be avoided, and it is better if everything in the whole room is washable. Light and cleanliness are primary considerations, and the child's health is more important than his education.

When it comes to the matter of decoration—color, ornament, and material—there is a wide enough range of possibilities to give play to the parents' or decorator's originality. There is no reason why there should not be beauty, good taste, and correct style in the child's room as well as in that of his elders. He may not be able to appreciate the fine points, but decorative excellence will have its effect.

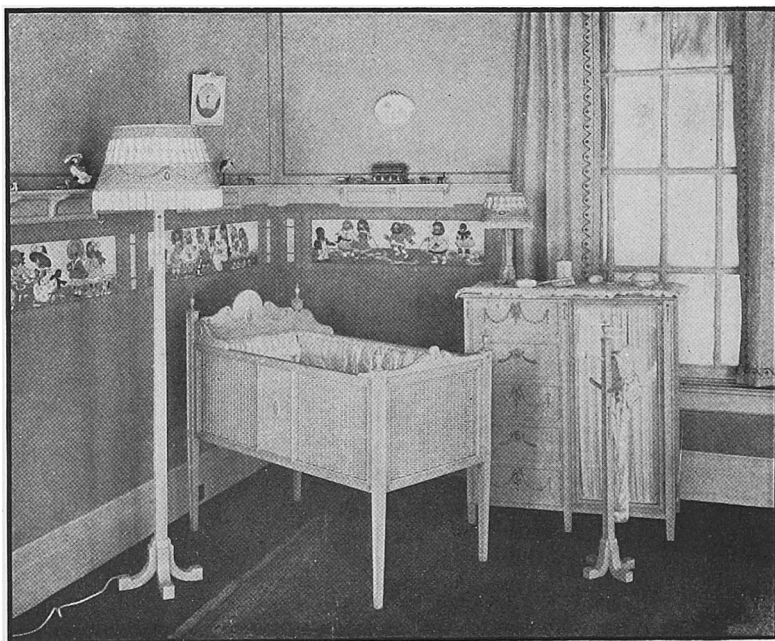
This brings us to the much-discussed subject of the educational value of nursery fittings—the psychological effects of environment. There is unquestionably a good deal in it, and it is worth while for the child to grow up among surroundings in which harmony of color, grace of line and proportion, and excellence of style are prominent features. There is an educational value in the mere fact that he has become accustomed to these things; the taste for them is likely to stay with him.

As for the educational value of pictorial decorations, I am not so sure. They are supposed to

cultivate and stimulate the child's imagination. Probably they do, but for my own part I think there is sufficient justification for them in the fact that they amuse him and give him pleasure, and make the room, on the whole, more attractive to him.

Mrs. Helen Speer, who has designed a good deal of children's furniture of the more original and imaginative sort, has some theories on the subject that are worthy of consideration. She is opposed to the purely fantastic and freakish and believes in the influence of good design and character in furniture on the child mind. It is bound to make a deep

impression on the unfolding mentality. Children's furniture, she holds, should never be commonplace; a certain element of humor in the lines has its appeal. The proportions should invariably be good, and the color harmonies and contrasts should invariably be marked. In the matter of decoration, interest should be the keynote, the play spirit should be appealed to. In every normal child's life the make-believe world of toys, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and



Courtesy of Ed. Jansen

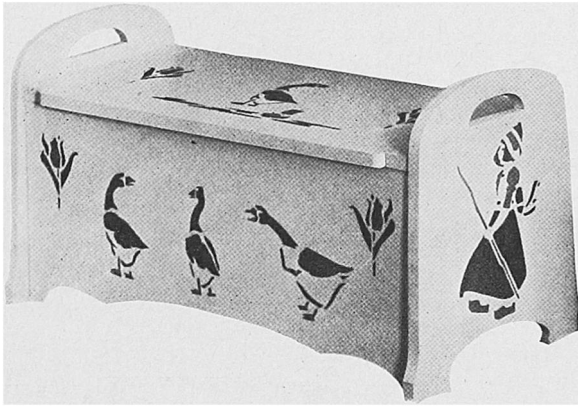
THE CORNER OF A TASTEFUL NURSERY IN WHICH WELL-DESIGNED FURNITURE OF THE ADAM TYPE IS USED. NOTE THE POSITION OF THE PICTURE FRIEZE AND TOY SHELF AND THE ARRANGEMENT OF WINDOW CURTAINS

the nonsense and marvels of "Alice in Wonderland" play a large part. These things are part of the child's familiar world; when utilized as decorative motifs they are comprehended. They stimulate the imagination and they add the element of interest.

In the matter of color, there should be, of course, no discordant effects. The lighter tints—what Mrs. Speer calls the happy colors—should predominate, but for the furniture and woodwork, cream, putty color, sand color, etc., are better than dead or glaring white.



Courtesy of the Conrey-Davis Mfg. Co.



COMBINATION SEAT AND TOY CHEST

The popular decorative subjects include figures of boys and girls, droll men and women, scenes from toyland and fairyland, frolicsome, friendly animals, and quaint, gay posies. Conventionalized designs, floral stencils, etc., when worked out with a view to the color effect, are also good.

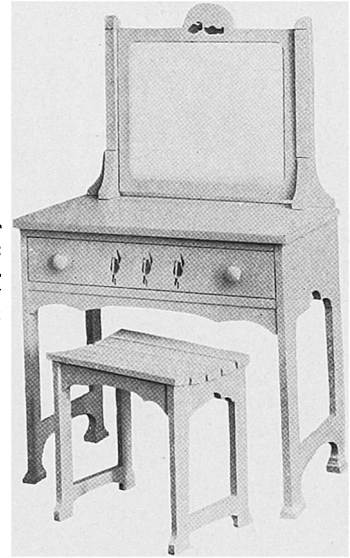
The best furniture for the child's room is not toy furniture, but practically useful pieces of reduced size. Extreme effects should be avoided. The child will like it better if it is like dad's, only smaller. A miniature Windsor chair, for example, is about as attractive a thing as I have seen in the nursery line. The ideal nursery furniture is adapted to the practical uses of the nursery, whether it be bedroom, playroom, schoolroom, or all three combined. The most useful sizes are neither too small nor too large—beds, for example, suited to children anywhere from two to twelve years old, that will not be too soon outgrown.

Of course, this does not apply to the nursery, that is primarily a baby's room. For such a room there are special fittings—bassinet, weighing-scales, chairs for mother and nurse, and such cabinets and tables as are useful in connection with the baby's feeding and toilet.

The nursery floor had best be of hardwood, preferably of a light color, covered with a few sanitary, washable rugs. Cotton rag rugs are hard to beat, and they are made in pleasing colors and interesting patterns. Washable window curtains are also better than heavier, more elegant materials. Bright figured goods are obtainable, if desired, but there is a danger of overdoing the figure business, and the room will be decoratively less confusing if some of the things are plain and unobtrusive. An *écru* scrim is difficult to improve on for the windows.

Wall-paper manufacturers have long been turning out interesting nursery papers—friezes, panels, and all-over side-wall patterns. Animal and toy-land subjects are featured in most of them. It is not difficult to select a suitable pattern. In decorating the walls, two things must be considered. In the first place, it is not desirable to place a nursery frieze in the usual place at the top of the wall; it should be hung lower, more nearly in the direct line of the child's vision. Otherwise, it means a craning of little necks and a straining of little eyes. In the

PART OF
THE
GOOSEGIRL
NURSERY
SUITE



second place, it is not desirable to hang delicately tinted papers where they can be soiled by children's fingers.

A good arrangement for the nursery wall is as follows: Let the woodwork be painted in a light tone, not dead white, with washable paint. A plate rail or shelf, running around the room above the child's reach, reduces the effect of height and makes a good place for the storage of books and toys when not in use. A dado of washable varnished paper or painted burlap is practicable, with an interesting figured frieze just below the shelf. Above that a dainty figured paper—perhaps an unobtrusive floral in a chintz effect—or an unfigured paper in harmony with the color scheme of the room, will give a good background for a few hanging pictures and offers, perhaps, the best decorative solution.

Other accessories of the nursery, such as toys, toy-boxes, window-seats, and pictures, are largely a matter of personal preference, though it should be borne in mind that a few good pictures are better than a large number of miscellaneous ones.

Finally, the lighting of the nursery is an important matter, for young eyes are sensitive to light and should have neither too much nor too little of it. Strong direct light should be avoided. There should be no unshaded incandescent bulbs; the indirect light given by inverted bowls near the ceiling is better. It should be possible to flood the room with germ-destroying sunshine, but while the child is in the nursery it is better to prevent the direct sunlight from shining into his eyes. Window curtains may be arranged to subdue the glare and be pulled back in the late afternoon.

Beyond these few suggestions, it does not seem necessary to lay down any fixed rules for nursery decoration and furnishing. The room should possess the element of individual character, and there are now so many things to be bought in the shops that it becomes largely a matter of selecting those things which appeal to the individual child, that make the nursery his own room, unlike any other, and yet an example of sound decorative principles.